



Rolf M. Hellman

World War II

**U.S. Army — Europe
65th Infantry Division
Sergeant First Class**

Korean War

**U.S. Army - Homefront
Counter Intelligence Corps
Army Security Agency
Sergeant First Class**

Rolf M. Hellman

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
January 27, 2016**

**Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois**



Niles Public Library District

Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Rolf M. Hellman** Rank: **Sergeant First Class**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Army** Theater: **World War II**

Unit: **65th Infantry Division, 3rd Army**

Interview Date: January 27, 2016

Place: Niles Public Library

Library Lower Level Meeting Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder
Canon Vixia Camcorder

Interviewer: Helene Sonkin

Videographer: Srdjan Vasilic

This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Wednesday, January 27th, 2016 here at the Niles Public Library. My name is Helene Sonkin and I am a member of the Patron Services Staff here at the library. I am privileged today to be speaking with my step-father, Mr. Rolf Hellman, who was born in Herzfeld, Germany on October 25, 1925 and who now lives in Palatine, Illinois. Mr. Hellman has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. We will now begin the interview. (Interviewer's words)

Shall I call you Rolf or Mr. Hellman?

You can call me Rolf. (Veteran's words)

Rolf, can you tell me when you first entered the service?

Right after I graduated from high school, I entered March, 1944.

Where were you living at that time?

In Chicago

What were you doing before - you mentioned you were in high school

Yes, I was in high school

Were you drafted or did you enlist?

I enlisted.

What branch of service were you in?

In the Army

Why did you pick that branch of the service?

I was eager and I wanted to fight - stupid, (chuckle)

Where were you inducted?

In Fort Sheridan, Illinois

Tell me a little bit about what your first days were like?

Well, I was with about a few thousand other people that either were drafted or enlisted – much routine paperwork, physical exams and being indoctrinated.

Can you tell me a little bit about boot camp, your training experiences like, for example, being away from home, your drill instructors, your living conditions, any lifestyle adjustments that you had to make?

OK, my boot camp was in Camp Blanding, Florida, and we took our Basic Training there, normally a 16-week basic infantry training. It was quite an adjustment. It was not too hard for me because I was used to it. I had a little bit of ROTC training in Chicago when I was in Lake View High School. Basic Training is mainly getting used to army life. The sergeant in charge is like a god. You do what he tells you and that's it.

It was summer time. It was very hot. In Florida we lived with all kinds of strange creatures, alligators and so on. We had to contend with wild pigs that gave us a hard time because they would dig into our tents at night and when we were away from the tents, dig up all the food that we had and so on. Other than that, it was just heavy, physical training.

Where did you go after boot camp?

After boot camp, we went for advanced military training in Camp Shelby, Mississippi, where they started a new infantry division. It was the 65th Infantry Division. I was in Camp Shelby until, I believe, October or November, 1944 and the whole Division went overseas. We joined General Patton's 3rd Army and at the time in France we relieved a division that was there already. I believe it was the 26th Infantry Division and we relieved them, man by man or squad by squad, and gave them a chance to go on rest.

And that was considered advanced training?

That was advanced training. In Florida it was a basic training and this was advanced training.

Did you have any stateside assignments?

At the time, no. I was in the 65th Infantry Division. My assignment was in a heavy weapons platoon, which had heavy machine guns and mortars so we had specialized training in that. But as soon as our division was ready and our commanders thought we were ready, we went overseas.

When did you depart for overseas duty?

I believe it was in November of 1944.

And from where did you depart?

We left from New York and landed in Le Havre, France

How did you travel to France?

By troop ship.

What was its mission?

Fight the Germans

Where was your unit first assigned?

In France, I don't remember the name of the place.

What was your first job?

As a gunner in Company D, a heavy weapons company

Do you recall what rank you were at that time?

I believe I was a PFC, Private First Class

What was your life like at that time, would you say?

Trying to stay alive. We were in the infantry. There was a lot of fighting and the main mission was that when you hear enemy shells coming in, you knew how to duck and hit the ground and hope it doesn't kill you.

Where did you sleep?

On the ground, wherever we could find a place to sleep. We didn't have tents so you just found a place to sleep in.

What did you have to eat?

Filet mignon (chuckle) whatever we could find. It was during the war and we were advancing into France and then into Germany. I had an advantage since I spoke German. I was able to find some pretty good food and houses where we could sleep, actually. And we would eat anything we could find.

Were you able stay in touch with your family?

We were permitted to send postcards, I forgot the names of those postcards that they had. But we could not tell them where we were or what we were doing, but we could tell them, you know, "We were fine" so no email or telephones.

So everything was censored.

Everything was censored.

Tell me a little bit about the pressure and the stress that you felt at that time.

The main pressure was to stay alive and try and kill as many enemies as you could. That was my main job.

Did you have any USO shows? We've all seen, Bob Hope and famous entertainers?

No we didn't have that. We did our own entertaining.

So no morale-boosting celebrities from Hollywood came?

No, not when I was there.

What did you do when you were on leave? Did you travel? Were you able to come home?

We didn't have any leave until after the war. And then we had a choice The Army gave us a choice: Italy, Switzerland, and Austria I decided to go to Switzerland because every place in Europe was destroyed mostly. I didn't want to see any more destruction than I had to. Switzerland was neutral so I decided to go to Switzerland for two weeks, I believe, and had a wonderful time.

That was after the war?

Yes, after the war. You don't have any leave during the war.

Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual events in general? In general I'm thinking a happy memory as opposed to a dark memory.

Well, one thing I remember was during the war. We were staying in a very nice house that belonged to the mayor of the little city we were in. During the night we went to sleep in a feather bed which was something that very unusual for us. We fell asleep and during the night our planes came over and started strafing us because they thought we were the enemy. We ran so fast because just about a few hundred feet from where we stayed was a big ammunition dump. I remember getting out of the house. Our own planes were strafing us and we jumped over the fence to get away from our own planes. I never moved so fast in my life!

Do you have any photographs or did you keep a diary or any other memorabilia from your days in the service?

No, I have none, nothing. What I had was lost. I had some letters but I didn't keep any.

Do you recall when your unit was first in combat?

Yes, I believe it was in December of 1944.

And where was that?

In France

And what was your assignment at that time?

I was a gunner in a heavy weapons company

And your experience with that for your first combat?

Trying to distinguish between enemy shells and our own shells. They have a special sound that the enemy shells make when they come at you. So when you hear them coming, hit the ground.

Anything that stands out in your memory from that first combat?

Yes, I was scared because we did not know what to expect.

Do you remember what happened?

No, I don't remember except, we were actually trained by the people that we relieved. They told us what to expect. They're the ones who told us the differences between enemy shells coming in and our own shells going out from our heavy artillery. There's a lot of noise but after a while you learn to distinguish the sounds.

Do you recall any casualties from your unit?

Yes, we had casualties but we were relatively lucky. The whole division, I don't remember what the casualties were, probably a couple of thousand. I don't remember exactly.

So talking about your time after your service, describe what it was like the day your service ended.

I remember when the war ended we were in Austria and the first time in my life I got so drunk that I actually got sick. That's what I remember about that day.

When and where were you discharged?

I was in General Patton's 3rd Army. After the war, actually, I was not discharged. In Fort Sheridan, I joined the United States Army Reserves. That was in August, 1946, I believe, somewhere along there.

What did you do in the days and the weeks after that time?

When I joined the reserve, I was told that since I was in the infantry during the war that I might want to join the military intelligence department which is what I did in the reserves. I went to school for military intelligence, once a week, and I also went to college under the G.I. Bill for four years, but every week we went for training.

So you went back to school then.

I went back to school then and that was in Chicago.

And did you work at that time or concentrate on school?

No, I always had part-time jobs when I was going to school.

And you mentioned that your education was supported by the G.I. Bill.

Right.

What did you go on to do as a career after the war?

After the war since I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and majored in Accounting (at Roosevelt University), I got my first job with a company called

Teletype Corporation. I worked there for a few years. I didn't particularly like the job, but it was a job.

Did you eventually marry and have a family?

Yes, I got married, had a daughter and then the Korean War started so then I was called back into active duty. But because of the training I had, I did not go back into the infantry. I went into what is now called the National Security Agency. At the time it was called Army Security Agency. I was sent to Massachusetts, that's where the headquarters were, Fort Devens, and to Washington, DC. Luckily I did not go overseas. I spent the Korean War in either Washington, DC area, or Baltimore, Maryland. The Korean War started just when I finished college. I graduated from college. But I was called back because I was in the Reserves and I could not go to my graduation exercises. They had to send me my diploma because I was called back into Active Duty and I went to Washington, D.C. and trained in the C-I-C, which was the Counter Intelligence Corps. My reserve training was in CIC, counter-intelligence, and when I went to Washington, D.C. I was transferred to the Army Security Agency, now known as the National Security Agency. I was stationed in Baltimore, Maryland and Washington D.C. but I was lucky I never went overseas. The funny part was that in those days the Army Security Agency's job was to intercept enemy communication, Morse Code and stuff like that. The job was very secretive. You had to have a top secret classification which I had but it was so top secret that nobody knew what the heck you were doing! I was in either in the Pentagon or one of the other big buildings, up on one of the top floors. I had an office there, but I had very little to do because no could come in there without authorization so most of my time was spent reading books and taking it easy. That was my accomplishment during the Korean War!

Did you stay in contact with any of your wartime buddies after the service? Did you continue any of those relationships?

No, we did not because we were just spread out all over the country. I wish I had.

Did you join any veterans organization?

No, I didn't.

Well since you said that you did not join any veterans organizations then that would mean that you didn't attend any reunions or meetings?

Meetings and stuff like that?

No. Well, we're winding down. How would you say your service and experiences affected your life today?

I felt very fortunate that I was able to join the Army and be of service. And the fact is that if it wasn't for the G.I. Bill I probably would never have finished college. I was very fortunate.

So you're a proud veteran.

Yes. I never regretted the fact that I was able to serve. Basically, the reason I joined the Reserves was so that I would not have to go back into the infantry. That was why I went to school and CIC

School, which is counter-intelligence school, and then got transferred to the National Security Agency or Army Security Agency. I was teaching German to American officers when I was there.

During the war, of course, we didn't mention that. Right after the war I was interviewing German prisoners of war and certified that they were ok to be discharged or not. We had a big book at the time of all the war criminals and stuff like that. We had to make sure that they were not wanted for war crimes.

For crimes against humanity?

Yes, for crimes against humanity.

Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or the military in general?

Yes, you do what you are told in the military. You don't have much of a choice. I was lucky. I was not wounded and I did not really have any bad experiences.

Is there anything else that you would like to add and share with us today that we haven't covered already?

Well, the one thing I am married to my present wife Elaine and I have a very nice family, a very nice step-daughter who is doing the interviewing right now!

But, no, I have been very lucky and fortunate.

Rolf, Mr. Hellman, I'm not used to calling you Mr. Hellman, obviously, because you're my stepdad. But thank you very much for coming into the Niles Public Library today and sharing your wartime experiences with us.

Thank you Helene for having me. I was glad to do it. And if they have any other questions just let me know.

In response to a follow-up question, Rolf explained that he interviewed several hundred prisoners in a POW camp in Germany while he was in military intelligence but never found one who was wanted for war crimes.

Reader's Note

An appendix of 3 items scanned from Mr. Hellman's service records follows:

Army Memorandum of May 4, 1944 requesting his surname name change in his records

Rolf's DD 214 Report of Separation for his second service enlistment during the Korean War

Rolf's Honorable Discharge Certificate dated December 30, 1952.

NA-Not applicable

17-455E 17067

CHARACTER OF SEPARATION		REPORT OF SEPARATION FROM THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES			DEPARTMENT	
HONORABLE					ARMY 5013	
SEPARATION DATA	1. LAST NAME—FIRST NAME—MIDDLE NAME		2. SERVICE NUMBER		3. GRADE—RATE—BANK AND DATE OF APPOINTMENT	
	HELLMAN, Rolf Martin		RF 36954749		Sgt 3 Sep 50	
	4. COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS		5. EFFECTIVE DATE OF SEPARATION		7. TYPE OF SEPARATION	
	ERC Unasg		12 Oct 1951		Rel fr AD	
SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA	3. QUALIFICATIONS		6. PLACE OF SEPARATION			
	1320 Chief Interpreter (German)		Fort Devens, Massachusetts			
	8. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION		9. PLACE OF SEPARATION			
	SR 615-363-5 PETS & DA Msg 25416		Fort Devens, Massachusetts			
SERVICE DATA	10. DATE OF BIRTH		11. PLACE OF BIRTH (City and State)		12. DESCRIPTION	
	22 Oct 1925		Berlin, Germany		SEX Male RACE Cau COLOR HAIR Brown COLOR EYES Brown HEIGHT 5'6" WEIGHT 150	
	13. REGISTERED		14. SELECTIVE SERVICE LOCAL BOARD NUMBER (City, County, State)		15. INDUCED	
	YES X NO		None NA		DAY MONTH YEAR	
SERVICE DATA	16. ENLISTED IN OR TRANSFERRED TO A RESERVE COMPONENT		17. MEANS OF ENTRY OTHER THAN BY INDUCTION		18. GRADE—RATE OR BARK AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE	
	YES X NO		COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS		ERC Unasg	
	17. MEANS OF ENTRY OTHER THAN BY INDUCTION		18. GRADE—RATE OR BARK AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE		Sgt	
	19. DATE AND PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE		20. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE (St., R.F.D., County, City and State)			
3 Sep 1950		Chicago, Illinois		536 W Cornelia St, Chicago 13, Illinois		
SERVICE DATA	21. NET SERVICE COMPLETED FOR PAY PURPOSES EXCLUDING THIS PERIOD		22. NET SERVICE COMPLETED FOR PAY PURPOSES THIS PERIOD		23. OTHER SERVICE (Act of 16 June 1942 as amended) COMPLETED FOR PAY PURPOSES	
	Not applicable		1 1 II		6 5 19	
	24. TOTAL NET SERVICE COMPLETED FOR PAY PURPOSES		25. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE			
	7 7 0		None			
SERVICE DATA	27. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADGES, COMMENDATIONS, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED		28. MOST SIGNIFICANT DUTY ASSIGNMENT		29. WOUNDS RECEIVED AS A RESULT OF ACTION WITH BREAST SPACES (Place and date, if known)	
	CIB		HQ&HQCo The ASA Tng Cen 8622 AAU Fort Devens, Massachusetts		None	
	30. SERVICE SCHOOLS OR COLLEGES, COLLEGE TRAINING COURSES AND/OR POST GRAD. COURSES SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED		31. SERVICE TRAINING COURSES SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED			
	None		None			
INSURANCE AND PAY DATA	32. KIND OF INSURANCE (Amount and premium due each month)		33. MONTH ALLOTMENT DISCONTINUED		34. MONTH NEXT PREMIUM DUE	
	U. S. L. \$10,000—\$6.35 U. S. G. L. I. None		Oct 1951		Nov 1951	
	35. TOTAL PAYMENT UPON SEPARATION		36. TRAVEL OR MILEAGE ALLOWANCE INCLUDED IN TOTAL PAYMENT		37. DISBURSING OFFICER'S NAME AND SYMBOL NUMBER	
	#103,746,307		58.86		R. PERKINS, Major, FC, Sym 215-494	
AUTHENTICATION	38. REMARKS (Continue on reverse)		39. SIGNATURE OF OFFICER AUTHORIZED TO SIGN		NAME, GRADE AND TITLE (Typed)	
	No time lost under section 6(a) appendix 2b MCM 1951 AGCT Score: II 126 Blood Group: O		[Signature]		G. F. SITWELL, Capt, Inf Military Personnel Officer	
	40. V.A. BENEFITS PREVIOUSLY APPLIED FOR (Specify type)		41. DATES OF LAST CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT		42. MAIN CIVILIAN OCCUPATION	
	None		FROM TO		Student, College	
PERSONAL DATA	44. UNITED STATES CITIZEN		45. MARITAL STATUS		46. NON-SERVICE EDUCATION (Years successfully completed)	
	YES X NO		Married		GRAMMAR SCHOOL COLLEGE DEGREE(S) MAJOR COURSE OR FIELD	
			8 4 4		B.S. Business Administration	
	47. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES AFTER SEPARATION (St., R.F.D., County, City and State)		48. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED			
536 W Cornelia St, Chicago 13, Cook Co, Illinois		Rolf M. Hellman				

ALL ENTRIES APPLY TO CURRENT PERIOD OF SERVICE (Unless otherwise indicated)

MOR PAID 1952
1888
Dist. by [unclear]
Accr. [unclear]

200 1

Company "D", 213th ITB
Camp Blanding, Florida
4 May 1944

SUBJECT: Change of Name:

TO : Commanding General, Infantry Replacement Training Center,
Camp Blanding, Florida;

1. Under authority contained in AR 345-1, Par. 4b (2) (b) 4,
dated 11 March 1944, request all records bearing my name as
Rolf M. Herrmann be changed to Rolf M. Hellman.

2. My name was changed from Rolf M. Herrmann to Rolf M.
Hellman by naturalization certificate No. 6259786, issued in United
States District Court, Southern District of Florida, Jacksonville,
Florida, on 21 April 1944.

Rolf M. Hellman
ROLF M. HELLMAN, 36954749
Pvt., Co. "D", 213th ITB.

1st Ind.

O.C. Co. "D" 213th ITB, Camp Blanding, Florida, 5 May 1944

TO: COMMANDING GENERAL, ITRC, Camp Blanding, Florida.

1. Approved.

Lavis I. Smith
LAVIS I. SMITH
Capt., Infantry
Commanding

GNRLE 2nd Ind. JFK/jth
HEADQUARTERS, ITRC, Camp Blanding, Florida, 6 May 1944.

TO: Commanding Officer, Co. "D", 213th ITB, Camp Blanding, Florida.

Approved.

By command of Brigadier General FALES:

J. F. Keating
J. F. KEATING
2nd Lt., Infantry
Asst. Pers. Officer.

Mr. Hellman shared this Army document from May, 1944, relating to his change of surname from Herrmann to Helman, the same name as his uncle's. Rolf was living with him in Chicago. Rolf changed his name after Basic Training when he became a U.S. Citizen.

Honorably Discharged



from the Armed Forces of the United States of America

This is to certify that

Sergeant ROLF M. HELLMAN, ER 36 954 749, MI-USAR, who enlisted 30 August 1949

was Honorably Discharged from the

Army of the United States

on the 30th *day of* December 1952 *This certificate is awarded*

as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service

Gerald F. Ely

GERALD F. ELY
Major ARTY